

Iraq

I opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, and I believe our military engagement there must be brought to a responsible conclusion. The courageous men and women of the United States Armed Forces have served admirably and improved the security situation in Iraq. But the Iraq government continues to fail to seize on the security gains to accomplish the real goal of the surge: political accommodation and economic reform.

In January of 2008, I traveled to Iraq and Afghanistan to learn more about the medical care that soldiers receive when they are injured in battle. I met with General David Petraeus, then commander of the U.S. forces in Iraq, and Ambassador Ryan Crocker, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq. I also met soldiers from southern Minnesota and saw firsthand that the U.S. Armed Forces are performing their mission excellently.

However, my trip confirmed for me that the Iraqi government was not making political progress and that the President Bush's policies in Iraq have created a dependent state that drains needed American resources – resources we need for Americans struggling in these tough economic times and for our real, most fundamental national security priorities.

Afghanistan

As a 24-year veteran of the Army National Guard, I emphatically believe in the value of open and honest debate about the most solemn act a democracy undertakes, using its military in an armed conflict. Unlike the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, begun after the awful attacks of September 11, 2001, was not begun as a war of choice. It has been a war forced upon us by those terrible attacks, and reinforced by the subsequent attacks on innocent civilians in allied nations.

The war in Afghanistan should never have gone on this long and it likely would not have had the Bush Administration not decided to shift resources to an unnecessary conflict in Iraq.

The Obama Administration has recently carried out an extensive review of our policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the President announced a new strategy. I believe that process was important to determining our long term goals in the region.

Before committing my full support to the President's strategy, I want to ensure that

Administration officials have all the details of the new strategy in place. I also want to make sure the President's plan fully synchronizes our diplomatic and developmental actions within the region.

In the townhalls I have held on Afghanistan, I have heard from many southern Minnesotans who have important questions. In the days and weeks ahead, I am looking forward to participating in briefings and conversations with Obama Administration officials where I will ask them to address the questions I have received from constituents.

I will remain vigilant in working to ensure that this time we get our Afghanistan and Pakistan policies right. It is simply too important to our national security to let the region once again become a safe haven for terrorists who would mount mass attacks on us and our allies.